

The issue of immigration has troubled Washington for years. There is a growing consensus that we desperately need comprehensive immigration reform, a total overhaul of the system. Unfortunately, just enough members of the Senate believe that is not the way to go and have stymied the entire process. But there are a few popular programs that should serve as an anchor for legislative work next year.

One piece of the immigration puzzle that has caused fear and anger is how we deal with undocumented aliens who break the law. I continue to advocate for a compassionate response to otherwise law-abiding immigrants, but we must take decisive action toward undocumented immigrants who break the law. They must serve their time, then they must be deported. Congress has approved funds to remove undocumented individuals from our jails and prisons and return them to their home countries.

Anyone enters the United States without permission should be penalized. But I also believe that long-term residents -- many who have worked for years in our fields, paid their taxes and have citizen children -- have earned the right to begin the long process toward citizenship. Toward that end, many members of Congress are supporting the Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits, and Security Act, better known as AgJOBS.

This bipartisan, bicameral bill ([H.R. 371](#)) will allow undocumented agricultural workers to become eligible for permanent resident status after meeting certain work requirements. AgJOBS was developed after years of discussion among legislators, growers, and farmworker and immigration advocates. Unfortunately, this legislation has stalled in both chambers of Congress.

I am also a cosponsor and strong supporter of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, also known as the DREAM Act ([H.R. 1275](#)). This bill amends the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 to allow immigrant students who have grown up in this country and graduated from high school to be eligible to attend college and provides a path toward legalizing their immigration status. Our current policies penalize children whose parents came to this country illegally. These talented children must be recognized and nurtured, not evicted from the country after years of good behavior and hard work.

AgJOBS and the DREAM Act both have an excellent chance of passage next year, and hopefully will become the cornerstones of a more comprehensive immigration reform. Only when we look at the entire system as a whole will we see the path toward successful change. I will continue to strive for a fair and balanced legal immigration policy, one that is compassionate, humanitarian and strikes the delicate balance between American jobs, border safety and national security interests.

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